

A close-up, low-angle shot of the American flag waving against a clear blue sky. The flag is positioned diagonally, with the top left corner of the image showing the stars and stripes. The flagpole is visible on the left side.

THE VIRGINIA EASY VOTER GUIDE

Information for Voters

As a Virginia Voter, you have the following rights:

- To be notified whether your voter registration **application** has been accepted or denied.
- To vote if you have registered at your current address at least 29 days before Election Day.
- To **receive** help from the election officials if you are unsure about anything relating to the voting process.
- To be given a demonstration of the voting equipment.
- To have your vote voided BEFORE IT IS CAST if you think you voted incorrectly. You will be given another chance to vote.
- To enter the name of a write-in candidate if the candidate of your choice is not on the ballot.
- To have a ballot brought to your vehicle if you are 65 years of age or older or disabled.
- To have an Election Official or other person help you vote if you are disabled or unable to read or write.
- ***Anyone who helps you to vote must do so according to your instructions, without trying to influence your vote, and may not in any way tell others how you voted.***
- To vote even if you have no ID with you.
- To vote a Provisional Ballot if your status as a qualified voter is in question.
- To bring your minor child, age 15 or younger, into the voting booth.
- To vote if you are in line by 7:00 p.m.
- To cast an absentee ballot if you are qualified to do so.
- ***You cannot be denied the right to vote if you are eligible to do so.***

As a Virginia Voter, you have the following responsibilities:

- To keep your voter registration information up to date.
- To show your ID at the polls. If you have no ID with you, you may still vote if you sign an Affirmation of Identity form.
- To request help if you do not know how to use the voting equipment, have questions about the voting process, or if you are disabled or unable to read or write.
- To check your ballot for correctness **BEFORE** you cast it.
- To know that once your ballot is cast, you **CANNOT** be given another ballot even if you think you voted incorrectly.
- To ask the election official to call the Voter Registrar's office **BEFORE** you leave the polling place if you have problems regarding your eligibility to vote or the casting of your ballot.

These statements are only a summary of U.S. and Virginia voting laws. Please read the "Voters' Rights and Responsibilities" poster at your polling place or go to the State Board of Elections' web site, www.sbe.virginia.gov.

If you have questions about your voter registration status or elections in your locality, contact your local Voter Registration office or go to www.sbe.virginia.gov.

If you feel your voting rights have been violated or that you may have witnessed an election law being broken, contact the State Board of Elections at: **1-800-552-9745**
or e-mail: info@sbe.virginia.gov.

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REGISTERING TO VOTE

Who Can Register to Vote?

To be eligible to register to vote in Virginia, you must meet all of the following criteria:

- Be a resident of Virginia.
- Be a U.S. citizen.
- Be 18 years old, or 18 by the next general election.
- You do not claim the right to vote in any other state.
- Cannot be currently declared mentally incompetent by a court of law.
- If a convicted felon, your right to vote must be restored.

How to Register to Vote

You can obtain a Voter Registration application at any DMV, public library, social service agency or Voter Registrar's office in Virginia. To find your Voter Registrar, look in the blue Government pages of your phone book under "Voter Registration" for your county or city, or go to the State Board of Elections' web site, www.sbe.virginia.gov, then click on *Where Do I Vote?*

You can download and print the Voter Registration application from the same website. Complete and sign it, and mail it to your Voter Registrar.

When to Register

The deadline to register is 29 days prior to a primary or general election. If your application is mailed, it must be postmarked no later than that date.

Can You Register Late?

If you are away from your locality on active duty in the military or with the merchant marine, you and your spouse/dependents residing with you may register late by mail. See *Uniformed and Overseas Absentee Voters*.

If you have been discharged from active duty within the 60 days prior to the election, or you are normally absent from your locality due to active duty, merchant marine service or overseas residency, or you have been absent due to such active duty, merchant marine service or overseas residency and return to your locality to reside there within the 28 days prior to the election, you and your spouse/dependents residing with you may register late in person at your Voter Registrar's office, up to and including Election Day.

Not Sure If You're Registered?

Contact the Voter Registrar in the city or county where you live to find out if you are currently registered.

How to Register If You Have No Fixed Address

If you have no fixed or permanent address, you can still register to vote. In the *mailing address* section of the application, use the address of an agency where you receive services or any other address where you are allowed to receive mail. In the *residence address* section of the application, list the location where you most often spend the night, even if it is not a traditional address.

Do You Have More Than One Address?

You should register to vote in the city or county you consider to be your legal residence. If unsure which city or county is your legal residence, contact the Voter Registrar. He or she will review your circumstances with you and help you determine the city or county where you should register to vote. Note that it is not legal for you to be registered to vote in more than one city or county in Virginia, or in more than one state in the U.S.

How to Report Changes in Your Name or Address

It's very important that you keep your name and address up to date so you can vote in every election. Submit your name or address change in writing, by either mail or fax, to your local Voter Registrar. You must sign the change unless you are physically unable to do so. Your mark (such as an "X"), if acknowledged by a witness, is considered a valid signature.

Absentee Voting for Those Who Cannot Vote in Person

If you will not be able to go to the polls on Election Day, you may be able to vote by absentee ballot. To determine if you are eligible to vote absentee, visit the State Board of Elections website, www.sbe.virginia.gov, and review the section on *Absentee Voting*, or print an application. Or you may request an application from your Voter Registrar.

Absentee Voting Applications may be completed in person in your Registrar's office, or sent by mail or fax. The deadline for requesting a mailed absentee ballot is the Thursday before the election. The deadline for applying and voting absentee in the Registrar's office is the Saturday before the election.

Late Absentee Voting, up to 2:00 p.m. on the Monday before the election, is permitted for those recently hospitalized and persons with certain other emergencies. Call your Voter Registrar if you have an emergency and will not be able to go to the polls, to determine if you are eligible for a late absentee ballot.

Regardless of when or how you apply for your absentee ballot, your voted, signed and witnessed absentee ballot must be received by your Electoral Board by Election Day, or it cannot be counted.

Uniformed and Overseas Voters

If the Uniformed and Overseas Citizen Absentee Voting Act (UOCAVA) applies to you, there are special provisions in federal and state law. Here's what you need to know:

- *Uniformed Citizens* are U.S. citizens who are members of the Uniformed Services, and their family members residing with them, who are away from the city or county in which they are eligible to vote. Uniformed Services are defined as the U.S. Armed Forces (Army, Navy, Marines, Air Force and Coast Guard), merchant marine, commissioned corps of the Public Health Service and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.
- *Overseas Citizens* are U.S. citizens who currently reside outside the United States, either temporarily or permanently.

To register and request an absentee ballot you need a Federal Post Card Application (FPCA). You can print this application from the following website: www.fvap.gov/pubs/onlinefpca.html

To access state registration and voting procedures, go to: www.fvap.gov/pubs/vag/vagchapter3.html

For general information, go to www.fvap.gov.

Please register and request your absentee ballot early. We recommend registering and requesting your absentee ballot no later than ninety days before Election Day, if possible, to allow for mailing time.

If you need individual assistance call the UOCAVA coordinator for the Virginia State Board of Elections at 804-864-8932 or via email at overseasvoting@sbe.virginia.gov.

College Students Living Away from Home

College students who still consider themselves residents of their home city, county or state should register to vote in that city, county or state, not in the city, county or state where they attend school. These students should contact the Voter Registrar of their **home** city, county or state to register to vote and request an absentee ballot to cast their vote.

Students who consider themselves to be residents of the city or county where they attend school should register and vote in that city or county, and should contact the Voter Registrar of the city or county where they attend school to register. If you have questions about where you should register, contact either Voting Registrar.

Most colleges and universities also offer voter registration and absentee ballot information through their Student Services offices.

Election Day Information

When Are the Polls Open?

All polling places are open from 6:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m. on Election Day. You may vote at any time during these hours, or if you are in line to vote at 7:00 p.m. when the polls close.

What to Bring on Election Day (Box heading/center)

Please bring your identification with you on Election Day. Examples of valid IDs for voting include:

- Virginia voter registration card
- Valid Virginia driver's license
- Any federal, state or local government-issued ID, including military ID
- Employer issued photo ID card
- Social Security card

If you do not show ID, you can still vote if you sign an “Affirmation of Identity” form affirming under oath that you are who you claim to be.

If you have lost your Voter Card, and there is time before the election, call your local Voter Registrar to request a new one.

Special ID requirements for voters who mailed their voter registration applications on or after January 1, 2003:

Federal law requires that if you did not include a copy of one of the following IDs with your mailed registration application, you must show one of these the first time you vote in a federal election, or you will have to vote by "Provisional Ballot":

- Current and valid photo identification

- Or one of the following that shows your name and address: current utility bill, bank statement, government check, paycheck or other government document.

How to Find Your Polling Place/Precinct

There are three ways to find where you vote:

- Your polling place name and address are printed on your Voter Card
- Call your local Voter Registrar
- Go to our web site, www.sbe.virginia.gov, then click on *Where Do I Vote?*

Demonstrations of Voting Equipment

You have a right to a demonstration of the voting equipment. There is a demonstration officer at every polling place. This person will ask if you want a demonstration of how to use the voting machine. Just say “Yes”.

Can My Child Watch Me Vote?

Your minor child, age 15 or younger, is allowed to go with you into the voting booth.

If You Need Assistance in Preparing Your Ballot

See Voters with Special Needs.

If You Do Not Want to Vote for Everything on the Ballot

If you prefer not to vote for a particular office or other item on the ballot, just skip that portion of the ballot.

For example: Two people are running for Mayor and you don't want to vote for either one, and you don't want to enter a write-in

candidate. But you do want to vote for a school board member. You can skip the choices for Mayor, and vote for the school board member of your choice.

Your vote for the school board member will still be counted.

Sample Ballots

A sample ballot is a copy of the official ballot. Sample ballots may be produced by Electoral Boards, political parties, political committees and citizens.

Every sample ballot **must** clearly state who authorized and/or paid to have it printed. Some sample ballots are created by groups to persuade you to vote a certain way. You may be offered this type of sample ballot on your way into the polling place. **Only** the Electoral Board's sample ballot is an unbiased, complete example of what will be on the official ballot.

The Electoral Board is required to post the Official Sample Ballot at each polling place on Election Day. If you're unsure of what's on the ballot, ask an Election Officer to show you a copy of the Electoral Board's sample ballot.

Write-In Votes

If you want to vote for a candidate who is not listed on your ballot, you can write in the name of the candidate of your choice. Write-In votes are permitted in every election except for primaries. You should **not** write in the name of a candidate who already appears on the ballot or it will not be counted.

Write-In instructions are provided on each voting system. For paper ballots, blank space is provided below each office for Write-In votes. Just write the name in the blank space. For optical scan or punchcard ballots, you must mark the "Write-In" choice and

also write in the name. If you have questions, ask an Election Officer about Write-In procedures.

How to Avoid Over Voting

What is “over voting”? An over vote occurs if you cast more votes than are allowed.

For example, if only two names are listed for Governor and you vote for both names, you have over voted.

If you over vote on certain types of paper-style ballots, the counting machine will initially reject your ballot and an Election Official will offer you a new ballot.

You can't over vote on an electronic machine (touch screen or dial-type) or on a lever machine. These machines are made so you can't accidentally cast an over vote.

Read each item on the ballot carefully to make sure you don't accidentally over vote.

Sometimes you **can** make more than one selection. For example, if five people are running for Board of Supervisors and there are three positions to fill, the ballot will say “vote for not more than three.” You may vote for up to three of the five names. This is **not** an over vote.

If You Make a Mistake on Your Ballot You May Be Able to Change It

You can change your vote if you do so **BEFORE** you cast your ballot:

- If using an electronic machine, change your choice **BEFORE** you press or select “Cast Ballot”.

- If using a paper ballot, tell an Election Official you want a new ballot.
- If using a lever machine, flip the levers so they show the choice you wanted.

Once you **cast your ballot**, you can't change your vote or vote again, even if you made a mistake.

Casting a Provisional Ballot

Virginia law requires a person to cast a provisional ballot if his or her registration status can't be verified either by the Election Officer or the Voter Registrar.

Provisional ballots are also used when a first-time mail registrant has not shown the required ID, or when a court orders the polls to stay open past their normal closing time.

A person is permitted to vote with the understanding that the vote may not be counted. The decision to count the provisional vote is made by the local Electoral Board on the day after the election.

If you cast a provisional ballot, you will be given a notice of the time and place of the Electoral Board's meeting, and a toll-free number to check the status of your ballot. You have the right to be present when the Electoral Board makes its decision about whether to count your provisional ballot.

Is My Vote Secret and Secure?

The voting machine records only your vote, not your name or address or anything else about you. Unless you tell someone how you voted, no one can know how you voted. If you use an assistant to help you vote, he or she is not allowed to tell anyone how you voted.

All the voting machines used in Virginia are rigorously tested and certified to be accurate and secure.

If You Are Not Allowed to Vote, What Should You Do?

First, review the “Voters’ Rights and Responsibilities” poster at the polling place or on our web site, www.sbe.virginia.gov, *Voters’ Rights and Responsibilities*. Make sure you meet the requirements that allow you to vote. If you do not understand all the requirements, ask an Election Official to explain them to you.

If you feel you met all the requirements but were still not allowed to vote, ask an Election Official to contact the Voter Registrar’s office about your case **before you leave the polling place**. The Voter Registrar will review your case and may be able to resolve the problem immediately.

If you are still not satisfied with the outcome, call the State Board of Elections at 1-800-552-9745 as soon as possible, **preferably before the polls close**. The sooner the State Board knows about your problem, the sooner we can respond to you.

You may also ask the Election Officials for an Election Day Complaint form. This form will tell you on how to file a formal complaint about your case with the State Board of Elections.

Who Can’t Register or Vote?

If you’ve been convicted of a felony, you can’t register to vote unless your civil rights have been restored by the Governor or other appropriate authority. For assistance in having your voting rights restored, contact the Clemency Representative with the Office of the Secretary of the Commonwealth at 804-786-2441.

If your voting rights have been taken away by a court through a mental competency proceeding, those rights may be restored by the court.

Voters with Special Needs

Elections are required to be accessible to persons with all forms of disabilities. This includes accessibility to the polling place, devices that make the voting machines accessible, and provisions for person who cannot read or write:

- All polling places are required to offer “curbside voting” to anyone who either has a physical disability or is at least 65 years old.
- Voters with disabilities may request to vote by absentee ballot instead of going to the polling place.
- You can request an audio ballot. You use headphones to listen to a reading of the ballot and make your choices. Audio ballots are currently available in many polling places and will be available statewide in 2006.
- You can choose an election official or other person to assist you. Blind voters may have any person of their choice assist them. Other voters may have anyone who is not their employer or union representative assist them.

Anyone who assists you in voting must do so according to your instructions, without trying to influence your vote, and may not in any way tell others how you voted.

These are useful tools in overcoming challenges to voting, however you are not required to use them.

If you have a disability, the best way to assure your right to vote is to contact your local Voter Registrar prior to Election Day. Discuss your particular needs and what assistance you need to allow you to vote.

Would You Like to Be a Poll Worker?

Election Official volunteers (also known as “poll workers”) are needed in every city and county in Virginia. Help the democratic process by becoming an Election Official.

There are only a few requirements to become an Election Official:

- You must be registered to vote.
- You must attend a training session prior to Election Day.
- You must be present at the polling place for the entire day of the election, however some cities and counties allow Election Officials to work partial days or “split shifts”.

You will be paid for both attending training and working the polls on Election Day. This amount varies from locality to locality.

To volunteer to become an Election Official, contact your local Voter Registrar.

Useful Information

Phone Numbers

- State Board of Elections: 1-800-552-9745
- In the Richmond area: 864-8901
- Telecommunications for the Deaf (TDD):
1-800-260-3466
- Clemency Representative, Office of the Secretary of the Commonwealth: 804-786-2441

Internet and E-Mail Addresses

- Virginia State Board of Elections: www.sbe.virginia.gov

- E-mail address: info@sbe.virginia.gov
- General UOCAVA information: www.fvap.gov.
- Federal Post Card Application:
www.fvap.gov/pubs/onlinefpcs.html
- Virginia UOCAVA registration and voting procedures:
www.fvap.gov/pubs/vag/vagchapter3.html
- Virginia UOCAVA representative:
overseasvoting@sbe.virginia.gov

To Find Your Local Voter Registrar

- Look in the blue Government pages of your phone book under “Voter Registration” for your county or city.
- Go to our web site, www.sbe.virginia.gov, then click on *Where Do I Vote?*
- Call the State Board of Elections at one of the phone numbers above.

The Virginia Easy Voter Guide

**Commonwealth of Virginia
State Board of Elections
200 N. 9th Street, Suite 101
Richmond, VA 23219-3497**

Phone: 800-552-9745

TDD: 800-260-3466

www.sbe.virginia.gov